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ABSTRACT

This study explores instructional and interpersonal factors policy issue is discussed in this digest. The school in school rather than dropping out. These students had failed, two or more times, that portion of Florida's State Student Assessment Test which was required for receipt of a high school diploma. Data for this study were collected in eight public high schools in three Florida counties. A total of 40 interviews were conducted with 18 students, 13 teachers, and 9 guidance counselors. Social learning factors emerged as important to the students. The findings are classified in three groups: the persister, inside the classroom, and outside the classroom. Students see themselves as good students, as fitting into the rule structure of their various high schools, and as having career aspirations. Student-teacher relationships, which include teacher expectations and instruction, are important segments inside the classroom. Lastly, activities and relationships are focused upon as integral aspects of the students' attitudes. Eight tables and 14 references are appended. (SI)

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# STAYING IN SCHOOL

## SOCIAL LEARNING FACTORS WHICH LEAD TO RETENTION

Sandra Bowman Damico

University of Florida

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STAYING IN SCHOOL
SOCIAL LEARNING FACTORS WHICH LEAD TO RETENTION

> *From the standpoint of school policy and practice, it is essential for educators to become knowledgeable about the way school can be perceived differently and can affect different groups of adolescents in different ways" (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, p., 380).*

Are nearly a quarter of our nation's adolescents incapable of mastering the high school curriculum? If not, then we have an institutional problem that isn't going to go away by itself.

The need to raise achievement levels of students in the United States is clear. Less obvious are the ways in which to accomplish this goal. Florida, similar to other states, has devoted considerable attention over the past decade to school improvement efforts. One key component of these efforts has been the adoption of State minimum standards of achievement and the institutionalization of a series of student assessment tests designed to measure their attainment. Unfortunately, a sizeable portion of Florida students repeatedly fail these tests. The most serious of these tests, especially from the student's point of view, is Part II to the State Assessment Test (SSAT-II), which measures functional literacy in communications and mathematics. This test, first administered to students in the spring of their sophomore year, must be passed in order for them to receive a high school diploma. If failed, the test may be retaken in the fall and spring of their junior and senior years, thus giving students five opportunities in which to pass it. If students prove unsuccessful on all five attempts, they are awarded a certificate of attendance rather than a diploma. This describes the fate of far too many of Florida's adolescents.

Thus along with efforts to improve overall educational attainment is the need to do so without "pushing out" of school a significant number of our high school students, those frequently termed at-risk. To date Florida has not been successful in this endeavor. In spite of a substantial investment of time and financial resources over the past five years, Florida has consistently ranked near the bottom in each of the previous five federal reports publicizing state graduation rates. Moreover, recent projections indicate that the trend of early school leaving is likely to increase during the next decade (Hodgkinson, 1988). But Florida is not alone. According to the Phi Delta Kappan (1987), 4.3 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 dropped out of school in this nation in 1985. Since school districts define "dropouts" differently, it is difficult to obtain exact statistics on this problem, but it appears that approximately one quarter of American adolescents fail to graduate from high school.

Regardless of the exact numbers, the problem is serious because young people who do not possess a high school diploma are effectively blocked from participating socially and financially in the mainstream of civic life (Catterall, 1985; Morgan, 1984; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1986). Therefore, states' efforts to improve academic standards must also address the issue of how to retain and increase the achievement levels of marginal students.

As long as our research efforts concentrated merely on understanding the family and personality characteristics of dropouts, we were unlikely to understand why some academically marginal students persisted in school while others, seemingly similar, dropped out. Given this initial focus, it should not surprise us to discover that our research has provided us with a great deal more information about those students who are likely to drop out than about school programs or policies which lead to increased persistence to graduation.

There is, however, a growing body of research available on school programs which are effective in decreasing dropout rates. It indicates that through directing attention toward the modifiable aspects of the educational process it is possible to substantially increase successful school completion rates, even for students who are at high risk of school failure (Schulz, Toles & Rice, 1986). For instance, we now know that the most powerful determinants of school leaving are not family and economic background factors, but low grades and disciplinary problems (Ekstrom, et al., 1987; OERI, 1987). Traditional disciplinary sanctions have the effect of convincing potential dropouts that they are not really wanted at school. This communication may be most clear in schools with ethnically diverse student bodies which differ from the faculty and staff who serve them (Rumburger, 1987; Wehlage, 1986). Schools can, in effect send out signals to at-risk youth that they are neither able nor worthy to continue to graduation (Wehlage, 1986).

The work at the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools (Wehlage, 1983; 1986;1987) has been particularly influential in moving the direction of dropout research away from the fixed characteristics of students toward the institutional norms that discourage at-risk students. In place of these disincentives, the Center has devised a program model for high schools that they believe would do a better job of attracting and retaining potential dropouts. The model focuses on the social learning climate and instructional strategies used to engage and motivate students. The model includes the following six elements:

1. small size class to generate sense of affiliation and loyalty;

2. autonomous authority to customize the learning environment appropriate to at-risk populations;

3. collegiality among teachers who share optimistic assumptions about student abilities;

4. high, enforced academic and behavioral standards;

5. active decision-making role for students;

6. experiential learning, emphasizing individual and group projects as volunteers in the community (Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987 pp 71-72).

To what extent do persisters, academically marginal students who do not dropout, report the above six elements as influencing their decision to stay in school. This study was designed to address this question. It explores those instructional and interpersonal factors which led a group of at-risk students, aged 17 to 19, to persist in school rather than dropping out. These students had failed, two or more times, that portion of Florida's State Student Assessment Test required for receipt of a high school diploma. This research was conducted under contract to Florida's Department of Education.

## METHODS

Interviews, complemented by student cumulative file folder data, were used in this study of high school students who had failed at least twice the Florida State Student Assessment Test, Part II (SSAT-II). The topics covered in the interviews, especially those with students, were complex and personal. They dealt with feelings, beliefs, and attitudes about educational experiences. Such topics may best be addressed through in-depth interviews which permit textured, idiosyncratic responses from those being questioned.

While data from an interview study are not generalizable in the same way as that gathered using an experimental design, they are appropriate when asking "how", "why", and "what" questions and when the interviewer has little or no control over the events being studied (Yin, 1984). Since the purpose of this study was to discern the perspectives, commonalities, and patterns of schooling experiences among a group of high school persisters, a case study design utilizing interview data was deemed particularly suitable.

## Sample

Data for this study were collected in eight public high schools in three Florida counties. The three counties were selected for inclusion in the study because of ease of access to their schools and variation in type of communities -- urban, suburban, and rural -- within them.

A total of 40 interviews were conducted: 18 with students who had failed at least one part of the SSAT-II two or more times but were persisting in school and making progress toward graduation; 13 compensatory education teachers of these students; and 9 guidance counselors. In addition to the interviews, data on courses taken and history of standardized achievement test results were recorded from students' cumulative folders. At four of the high schools survey data were collected from an additional 103 students who also had failed the SSAT-II at least twice but who were not interviewed because of time constraints. These multiple data sources were used in order to triangulate results thus increasing the validity of the findings.

The Director of the Statewide Student Assessment Program, Department of Education, provided a listing of the name, address, county, high school, and SSAT-II subtest failed for those students whose parents had returned to the DoE an interview consent form. Based on this information a student interview sample was selected to reflect diversity in terms of the part of the test repeatedly failed (communications or mathematics), race and sex. Table 1 provides demographic data on those students who were selected for interviews.

Insert Table 1 here

As indicated in Table 1, slightly over half the students interviewed (55.8%) were retaking the mathematics portion of the SSAT-II while only 16.5% needed to repeat the communications part of the test. Approximately a quarter of those interviewed (27.7%) had experienced difficulty with both portions of the test. Almost three-quarters of the students interviewed were black (72%); 39% were female. These percentages are generally reflective of the statewide pattern.

## Procedures

### Instrument Development

For the purposes of this research separate semi-structured, open-ended interview guides were developed for use with the persisters,

compensatory education teachers, and guidance counselors. The guides were open-ended enough to probe the experiences and beliefs of those being interviewed while containing enough structure to permit comparisons across respondents.

The interview guide for students was designed to tap their opinions and concerns about the preparation and taking of the SSAT-II as well as many of the issues contained in the research literature on dropouts and student academic success/failure. The final student interview schedule contained 13 sets, or families, of questions: School Climate; Instructional Modes; Content Area - Math and Communications; Courses; Teachers; The SSAT Test; Peers; Basic Skills Classes; Recollections of Previous Schooling; Work; Family; and Self-Concept.

The interview schedule for the compensatory education teachers was developed to obtain descriptions of their instructional programs and to solicit their opinions about why some students persisted in school while others dropped out. The interviews with guidance counselors were aimed primarily at understanding how the SSAT-II was administered in their schools, how feedback on test results was provided to students, and what kinds of support services were provided to marginal students.

The student survey was developed to reflect the issues contained in the student interviews. Open-ended questions also solicited their responses to several questions about rules, policies, and discipline issues.

The Interviews

All interviews were conducted during school hours. The student interviews were conducted in quiet, private offices or conference rooms, thus insuring confidentiality. Student interviews varied in length from 50 minutes to two hours with the median being 90 minutes. With two exceptions the compensatory education teachers were interviewed in their classrooms during their planning periods. These interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, with the median being 45 minutes. Interviews with guidance counselors were conducted in their offices and were completed within half an hour.

Individuals being interviewed were asked if they minded having the conversation taped; one compensatory education teacher asked that her comments not be recorded. The remaining 39 interviews were taped; additionally, written notes were taken during each interview as a guarantee against equipment failure. Observations of the interviewee and the interview-as-an-event were also written. All interviews,

recording of cumulative file folder data, and transcriptions of interview tapes were completed by a single individual.

### The Survey

The student questionnaire was administered by the researcher to compensatory education students in four of the participating high schools. These surveys were administered to classes meeting during times when interviews were not being conducted and so do not reflect a random sample. They were designed to function as validation of student interview data.

### Data Analysis

The purpose of interviewing is to access the perspectives of those being interviewed. Lofland (1971) has argued that the strong suit of qualitative research is its ability "to provide an orderly description of rich, descriptive detail" (p. 59). The purpose of analysis of interview data is to discern and report "how people construe their world of experience from the way they talk about it" (Frake, 1962, p. 74). To do this transcripts of the interviews were analyzed for response patterns, or "recurring regularities" (Guba, 1978), which might provide insight into the educational experiences and perceptions of a group of persisters. Particular attention was focused on social learning climate indicators and instructional strategy preferences, or modifiable aspects of schooling (Wehlage, Rutter, and Turnbaugh (1987).

To facilitate analysis, interviews were transcribed on a computer and the Ethnograph software program (Seidel, 1988) was then used. The Ethnograph program was designed to assist qualitative researchers in many of the mechanical aspects associated with data analysis. For instance, the program permits the researcher to quickly search for patterned responses across multiple interviews even when contained in separate files.

Emphasis in this analysis was upon the experiences and perceptions of the student persisters. Interviews with compensatory education teachers and survey data were used to augment the student interview data and to provide context for them. Given the purposes of this paper, the views of guidance counselors have been omitted.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It seems appropriate to begin this section by describing the students who were interviewed in terms that go beyond their race, sex,

and how many times they had failed the State Student Assessment Test, Part II (SSAT-II). With two exceptions they were interested in the interview and provided thoughtful answers to the questions. They were not reticent in voicing what they liked and didn't like about school; what they thought helped and hindered their academic progress. Eleven of the 18 students included within this study had successfully passed the test by the time they were interviewed. The remaining seven had retaken the test a week or so before the interviews and felt confident that they too had passed. Their past test scores indicated that every time they had retaken the test they had made substantial improvements in their scores. Their teachers concurred in the belief that they had passed the test. So these students who had had severe problems in meeting a state mandated criteria for a high school diploma, had persevered and had success to show for it. The question we are pursuing now is what do these students have to tell us that might help us understand why they were successful when so many have not been.

Social learning factors clearly emerge from the interview data as important to this group of students. In order to be able to talk meaningfully about them, they have been clustered to represent those influences emanating from *Inside the Classroom* and those from *Outside the Classroom*. The pattern of these influences is illustrated in Figure 1. In this figure the persister is pivotal, since this is the individual whom we are seeking to understand. Those influences subsumed under *Inside the Classroom* emerge as the more prominent, as the discussion of them will indicate. *Inside the Classroom* is further broken down into three areas: Perceptions of Teachers; Teacher Expectations; and Instruction. Instruction is further subdivided into Instructional Strategy and Context. *Outside the Classroom* influences are categorized as either Activities or Relationships. Activities includes participation in extracurricular clubs and work while the relationship category is composed of friends/classmates and parents.

Insert Figure 1

The model depicted in Figure 1 clearly does not encompass all those variables which might affect a student's decision to persist in school rather than dropping out. But it does indicate that many features of school life important to these students are modifiable by educators and thus should be taken seriously.

Results from the interview data will be discussed as they are portrayed in Figure 1. A table has been developed for each element of the model and includes representative verbatim comments of students.

The Persister

Before examining the various components of the model depicted in Figure 1 we should start by asking how do these students describe themselves. Table 2 presents representative student comments divided into *type of student, abilities, and aspirations.* These comments tap various aspects of self-concept-as-learner, an important dimension of whether an individual believes that perseverance will pay off.

Insert Table 2

For the most part, those interviewed see themselves as good students. Their self-descriptions include phrases such as:

*I'm a good student.*

*I'm learning and I'm hard working.*

*I don't cause problems in class.*

*I'm really easy to get along with.*

Thus, these students see themselves as fitting into the rule structure of their various high schools -- they are not behavior problems; not in conflict with authorities. Additionally, they see themselves as capable of learning. In fact, they comment on how much they feel they are actually learning. Illustrative comments here reflect this orientation.

*I think I understand it [math] more than my grade shows.*

*Math isn't my favorite subject but I'm trying hard to pass.*

Finally, most of the students had career aspirations. These ranged from joining the army to becoming a herpetologist or computer programmer. These orientations to school and learning are obviously assisting these students in navigating the increasing course and test requirements needed for graduation. While it is impossible to know exactly how these students developed a sense of confidence in their own abilities, their comments about other features of the school environment are amenable to analysis and manipulation. It is to them that we turn in an effort to understand how we can assist more students in persisting in high school to graduation.

Inside the Classroom

Tables 3 through 6 highlight student responses about those features inside the classroom which impinge upon them both positively and negatively. Table 3 examines student-teacher relationships and Table 4 teacher expectations. Tables 5 and 6 explore student perceptions of instruction; one table focuses on instructional strategies while the other is concerned with context within which learning occurs.

Student-Teacher Relationships

The comments contained in Table 3 paint a clear and consistent picture of one of the most important aspects of school in the life of students -- their relationships with their teachers. Student comments varied from how teachers treated students in general to the specific, or how they felt they as individuals were treated. Students liked teachers who talked to them as though they were adults and whom they felt related to, cared about, and understood students. The type of student comments recorded here included:

*Most teachers treat us like adults.*

*Teachers treat students just fine at this school.*

*Teachers understand a lot about students.*

Insert Table 3

In terms of their own relationships with teachers, these students responded very positively to those whom they believed liked them. They used phrases such as:

*The teacher liked me a lot.*

*Teachers treat me okay at this school.*

*Teachers here get to know you personally.*

Students also provided explicit comments about the types of teacher-student relationships which got in the way of learning. These comments tend to be the direct opposite of the positive ones already cited. For instance students indicated that *"A lot of teachers are impatient with students"* or more damagingly, *"I think he didn't like*

*some students".* Regardless of affective tone of these comments, the message is the same. These students want teachers who, in general, care about students; and they especially value having a personalized relationship with their own teachers. Statements of this nature were so pervasive in the interviews that it must be concluded that student teacher relationships are a keystone in teaching the marginal academic student.

Obviously student teacher relationships do not stand alone. The comments contained in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 become cumulative when trying to understand the impact of the school environment on these students. Table 4 looks at teacher expectations through the eyes of these students.

Teacher Expectations

Many of the students' comments about teachers related specifically to those who had taught their compensatory education classes. These teacher, more than others, appear to have made an impact of the educational lives of these students. In a variety of ways these teachers had clearly indicated to these students that they were capable of learning. One student reported *"My teacher believes I can learn"* while another stated, *"Just the way she acted made you know she felt we were accomplishing good things."* As expected, teachers had praised and encouraged the students. But they had also pushed them: *"In the skills class students have to buckle down and work hard."*

Insert Table 4

Unfortunately, these students also had negative comments to make about teacher expectations. They had encountered teachers who had told them they were incapable of learning, who didn't care whether or not they learned, and who didn't expect very much from them. Those interviewed were very critical and bitter about these teachers.

Instruction

Since one of the purposes of this study was to solicit student perceptions of ways in which they learned best, it was not surprising that a large number of comments focused on this topic. The analysis of the instructionally related comments revealed that there were two aspects of instruction of importance to students. One area covered the actual methods of instruction used in the classroom while the other related to the context within which teaching and learning

occurred. These differences are reflected in the way in which this factor is divided.

*Instructional strategies.* While not a specific strategy, "explaining" and "helping" are obviously of great importance to these students. By this they mean that teachers are willing to provide multiple explanations and examples in order for them to master the content. Student after student reported that over the years their efforts to have their questions answered or material explained a second or third time were generally met with a caustic, *"why didn't you listen the first time?"* One student summed up the sentiment of many when he stated, *"I had been paying attention - I just didn't understand it."* And this type of teacher response had had very definite consequences. Many students said that they had quit asking for explanations even when they didn't understand the material. One student stated that he understood there were lots of students in his classes and that it made it difficult for teachers to provide all of them with individual help. But understanding this fact of school life did not solve his problem. He, like most of the students in the sample, indicated that he frequently needed multiple explanations before understanding classroom material. Thus those students who needed the most assistance had learned not to ask for it. An example of a successful approach, as relayed by one of the students combined explaining and having the student talk through what she had done:

> *What helped me most was she explained how to work a problem in class and the next day we had to explain to her how we worked it. And she tells you if you're right and I know I know how to work the problems.*

And a similar perspective from another students:

> *A teacher could help [me learn math] by putting examples on the board and then going over each step carefully. My comp. ed. teacher does this. Other teachers just explained in broad terms and didn't go through the process of working the problem step by step.*

Insert Table 5

Beyond the general concepts of explaining and helping, students were able to provide specific information about the teaching methods which were most and least effective in helping them learn. Repeatedly students stressed how much difficulty they had listening to material

present orally by teachers. Teacher lecture was their least preferred learning method. They felt they learned best when given opportunities to participate in discussions and/or work in small groups. Unfortunately, teacher lecture was cited as the most common instructional mode used by regular classroom teachers. There was also a definite call for more one-on-one instruction from teachers. This appears to be related to the fact that these students generally needed several explanations of new material before they clearly understood it -- and felt they weren't getting it in group settings. On the negative side were teachers who only lectured and those who wouldn't explain assignments.

*The context of learning.* Table 6 summarizes the perceptions of students about the context within which teaching and learning occurs. In addition to explaining, helping, and varying instructional strategies, compensatory education teachers work to catch and hold the interest of their students. This comes through in student statements such as: *"gets students involved", "made learning fun", and "gives us a lot of work, but <u>not</u> a lot of boring lectures."*

Insert Table 6

Classroom management was on the minds of these students. A number of them raised the issue directly by stating that the noise levels in their regular classrooms interfered with their ability to hear the teacher and concentrate. One of the things they had liked most about their compensatory education classes had been the control teachers had exercised. There were times when students were permitted to talk; but at other times they were expected to be quiet and listen to the teacher. Low achieving students may be sensitive to, and easily distracted by, noise. Recall that none of the sample reported being able to learn well through lecture.

And not to be underrated were student observations about whether their teachers liked teaching, knew their subjects, and could teach. For instance, *"He was nice, but couldn't teach."* Context variables obviously do not stand alone, but they should not be discounted. In fact, to these students they were <u>very</u> important.

<u>Outside the Classroom</u>

School life is not limited to only those things which occur within classroom walls. Many factors outside the school itself impinge upon the effectiveness of the academic program. As previously indicated, the *Outside the Classroom* factor is divided into Activities

and Relationships, each of which contains one variable within the school and one totally outside it.

Activities

Participation in extracurricular activities and work outside the school are both included within Table 7. As anticipated, very few of the interviewed students reported any involvement in school extracurricular activities. Two males indicated they were actively involved with the youth group at their church and another played soccer for a city league and took karate lessons. None of the females were involved in any school activities nor did they report being involved with any out-of-school groups.

Insert Table 7

Explanations for lack of involvement in school activities varied but tended to fall into one of two categories: lack of available activities and lack of interest. Some students felt that the school did not offer anything in which they were interested. The males, in particular, felt that only large team sports were available. A group of black females reported that they had tried to organize a flag corps at their school. Even though they had secured a faculty sponsor the principal had banned the group because they had not followed district policies for starting a new activity. While this group of black females saw this as a racist act, it was symptomatic of the fact that black females are hesitant to join bi-racial groups (Damico & Scott, 1988).

Participation in activities does not constitute a major part of the lives of these students. The impact of their lack of involvement in school clubs and groups should be explored in greater depth.

It had been expected that most of these academically marginal students would hold after school jobs. This did not prove to be true. Only one student reported that his job interfered with his schoolwork, and he worked 37 hours a week. A female worked at McDonalds and a male at a bookstore. But these three were the only ones of the 18 students who reported that they worked after school or on the weekends.

Relationships

Student comments about their relationships with their friends, classmates and parents are contained in Table 8. Many of those

interviewed indicated that they had friends at school. But most reported having just a few close friends and not a large pool of acquaintances. This is probably attributable to their lack of participation in school activities. Some of the students reported not having any friends at school and indeed preferring to be alone. Regardless of the size of their friendship circle, none of the students admitted to wanting it changed. In fact, two students gave as reasons for having few friends that they got you into trouble -- involved you in fights and got you suspended.

Insert Table 8

The parents of most of the students regularly queried their children about their homework; all asked to see report cards and frequently asked about grades. Many came to the open house in the fall to meet their child's teachers. Parents expressed a positive opinion about the school their teenager attended. Most of the students had set places at home where they did their homework; this varied from desks in their rooms to the kitchen table.

The perceptions of these persisters, marginal adolescents who were going to graduate with a high school diploma, add weight to what other lines of research have been concluding:

> ...effective alternative programs for marginal students indicate that such students respond positively to an environment that combines a caring relationship and personalized teaching with a high degree of program structure characterized by clear, demanding, but attainable expectations (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, pp 391-392).

The teachers who most clearly embodied the above description, were the compensatory education teachers. Students referred to them constantly. And no wonder. For many this had been the first class in which they had ever been academically successful. This was not accidental. The compensatory education teachers all stated that these students needed to develop self-confidence in their ability to master academic material. They had had so many negative experiences that they had to be convinced they were capable of learning. Tied into building self-confidence was a conscious effort to teach students study and test taking skills. For example, teachers had discovered that many students completely gave up on a test the first time they encountered a question they couldn't answer.

But compensatory classes were not considered easy. Students quickly learned that these classes were serious and that they were to be in their seats ready to work as soon as the bell rang. In return the compensatory education classes provided these students with lots of individual assistance; multiple explanations were always available when needed. Particularly important was the fact that instruction was rarely delivered in a lecture format. These students were not auditory learners. They found lectures boring and difficult to follow. The instructional modes used in the compensatory classes varied frequently to include such activities as individual work, small group activities, class discussions, and movies. These were among the instructional formats the students had frequently listed as ways in which they learned best.

Because of the small size of compensatory classes teachers were able to carefully monitor student progress. They had high, but realistic, expectations for their students. They pushed them. At the same time it became clear to their students that these teachers really cared about them and whether they succeeded. Moreover, they liked to teach and they specifically liked to teach these students.

If we now go back and review the program elements proposed by the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools for retaining at-risk students, we note that the students interviewed for this study confirmed most of them. Indeed, it was the modifiable aspects of school which were most salient to the students interviewed. "Schools send out signals to at-risk youth that they are neither able nor worthy enough to continue to graduation" (Wehlage, 1986, p. 21). While the students interviewed for this study could recount numerous instances of the "signals" to which Wehlage refers, they had also been on the receiving end of very positive academic and personal messages. Teachers emerge as the center of a very complex web of schooling experiences, the totality of which leads some students to believe they are capable of meeting the academic demands of the school. Among the key components in this web are high teacher expectations, varied teaching styles, systematic presentation of material with immediate feedback, and a personalized learning environment. The message is clear: teachers can make a difference. But a mystery still exists. Every individual is unique and we can never know exactly what will make a difference for someone. So we too, like Sisyphus, need to accept the burden of an unending task -- but ours has wins as well as losses.

Table 1

SSAT-II SUBTESTS FAILED BY SAMPLE
BY RACE AND SEX OF STUDENTS

| Group | n | Percent Failed - Total Sample | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Mathematics | Communications | Both |
| MALES | | | | |
| White | 3 | 11.1 | 5.5 | 0.0 |
| Black | 8 | 17.0 | 5.5 | 22.2 |
| FEMALES | | | | |
| White | 2 | 5.5 | 0.0 | 5.5 |
| Black | 5 | 22.2 | 5.5 | 0.0 |
| TOTAL | 18 | 55.8 | 16.5 | 27.7 |

FIGURE 1. SOCIAL LEARNING FACTORS AFFECTING HIGH SCHOOL RETENTION

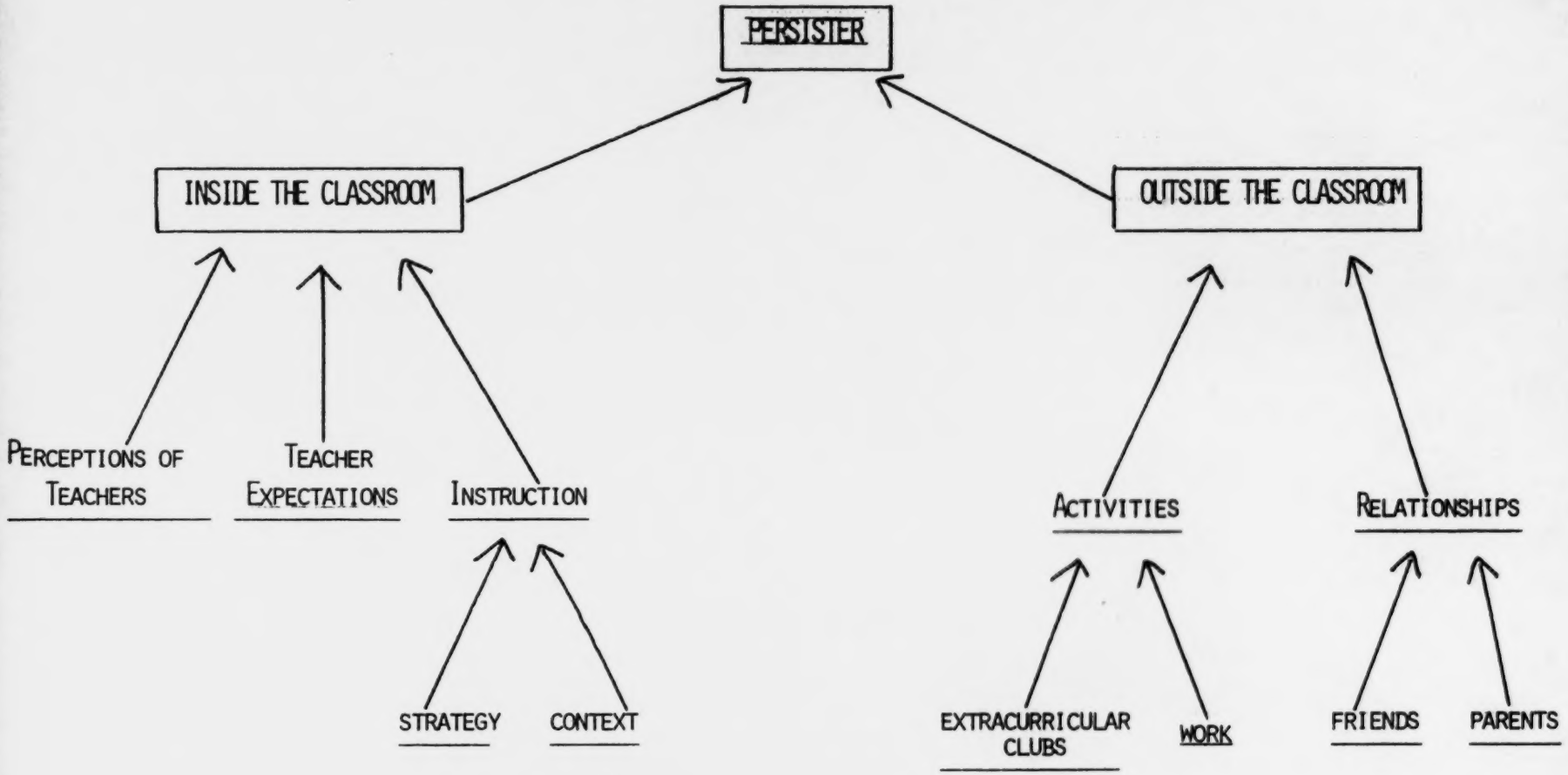

Table 2

PERSISTERS' SELF DESCRIPTIONS
SELECTED COMMENTS

Students Describe Themselves, Their Abilities, and Their Aspiratiions

*Type of Student:*

-You can't let yourself down.
-I'm a good student.
-I'm learning and I'm hard working.
-I'm good at asking teachers for help when I don't understand something.
-I'm a good, quiet, hardworking student.
-I feel good when I pass a test or get a good grade in a class.
-Part of being successful is you have to decide for yourself that you're going to be successful.
-I'm dependable.
-I don't cause problems in class.
-I'm really easy to get along with.

*Abilities:*

-Math isn't my favorite subject but I'm trying hard to pass.
-I think I understand it [math] more than my grade shows.
-I have problems taking tests.
-I don't feel my grades are an accurate measure of my abilities. I've had some bad grades, but I would have gotten better ones if I had wanted to.
-My grades are an accurate measure of my abilities.
-Some kids do better in school than others because they sit down and study a lot. Some of them study a whole lot.
-I think I deserve a higher grade. I've been there [class] every day and I'm trying to do the work.
-Luck plays some part in grades - if the teachers ask the right questions. But you've got to study, too.

*Aspirations:*

-I want to be a herpetologist.
-I want to be a computer programmer when I graduate from high school.
-I don't know what I want to do when I graduate.
-In five years I want to own my own business typing for others.
-I feel that I can learn to do math.
-I want to go to college.
-I want to get a good job when I graduate; maybe join the army.

Table 3

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM: STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

Student Perceptions of Teachers - Selected Comments

*Positive Comments*

-Some of the teachers at this school have really tried to help me learn.
-She cared about the students and their learning rather than her just getting through the material.
-This class was like a family. She explained things carefully and treated students like we were part of her family and she wanted us to understand and do well.
-She likes to help you.
-She worked with each student as though you were the only one there - the only one that mattered.
-She seemed to really care about each person; wanted to teach everybody rather than just get them out of there.
-I like the teachers here. I like the way they act. They're nice and some of them understand; and some of them don't. Some understand the way students feel about their schoolwork and homework.
-She explained it like the student was more on an equal basis.
-She was always nice to me.
-Teachers basically treat students pretty good here.
-Most teachers treat us like adults.
-Teachers at this school treat students like family.
-She is like a friend to us.
-She cares whether I learn.
-She has given me lots of guidance.

*Negative Comments*

-I think he didn't like some students.
-They [administrators] don't believe students. They don't listen to what we are saying.
-He just didn't care about the students.
-There's no one [adult] at this school for me to talk to.
-A lot of teachers are impatient with students.
-My English teacher treats students like little kids.
-A few teachers at this school don't like students.
-Some teachers don't want to work with you.
-She liked teaching -- she just didn't like teaching us.

Table 4

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM: TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

Selected Student Comments - Teacher Expectations

*Positive Comments:*

-My teacher said I know you can do it [pass the SSAT-II]; you are going to do it!
-Just the way she acted made you know she felt we were accomplishing good things.
-She wanted us to understand and do well on the test.
-The compensatory education teacher gave me courage -- she knew I could pass the SSAT-II and convinced me I could. And I did!
-My teacher believes I can learn.
-What I liked most about the class was that the teacher believed we could learn a lot, and we did.

*Negative Comments:*

-He wouldn't encourage students.
-She told us we didn't have a chance of passing the class.
-He didn't care whether we learned.
-My English teacher doesn't believe students are capable of much work.
-Some teachers don't ask very much of students.
-When I don't understand the work teachers say you didn't pay attention, you didn't listen.

Table 5

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM: INSTRUCTION STRATEGIES

Selected Student Comments on Instructional Strategies

*Positive Comments:*

-If you have a problem and you don't understand, you can come up to her and ask how to do it, and she explains it.
-She would give homework and explain how to do it.
-She gives you homework and the next day asks how did you get it [the answer], explain it, what steps did you use.
-She explained it to me whenever I asked.
-I learn the most when teachers work with you one-on-one.
-I don't like lectures cause most teachers drag them out too long and put you to sleep.
-I prefer to work alone with the teacher. I like being able to ask the teacher for individual help.
-She teaches us how to read the math problems.
-I like working with a computer; I think it is a good way to learn because it lets you know right from wrong right away.
-She taught us how to take tests -- what to do when we came to a problem we didn't know the answer to.
-I like the teacher to write on the board. The things they write on the board, we can copy down and take home and study for the next day.
-She gives us a lot of work, but not a lot of boring lectures.
-He made us discuss the material [science], and we really learned it.
-She asks a more difficult question when you get an answer right.
-I learn best when we have class discussions and then do a worksheet or take a test.

*Negative Comments:*

-Most teachers teach by talking all the time.
-He wouldn't explain assignments.
-She didn't give any individual attention.
-He would give you work, but when you came and asked about it she didn't want to talk about it.
-He was a good teacher, but went through the material too slowly.
-She didn't teach us anything.
-Some teachers call on students they think don't know the answers.
-He would never really help me understand what was going on in math class. He didn't explain it so I could understand.
-I've never used a computer to learn anything.
I would have learned math better if the teachers would of have sat down with me and helped me learn math better.
-I don't learn well when we just read the material and then take a test on it. I read fine, but that just doesn't knock it into my head.

Table 6

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM: INSTRUCTION
THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING

Selected Student Comments - The Context of Instruction

*Positive Comments:*

-Teachers here push me and I'm learning.
-He gets students involved.
-She made learning fun.
-She compliments students on their work.
-My teacher likes teaching; I can tell because she encourages us.
-She never made me feel there was something wrong with me if I didn't understand how to work a problem.
-I think he likes teaching because he always is telling us how much he like it.
-I liked the smaller class.
-Teachers here like teaching.
-He's a great teacher.
-I like the way he teaches; he knows how to teach.
-The teachers here know their subjects and how to explain them.
-I can learn a lot from her.
-Most teachers can keep their classes under control.
-Teachers give grades based on class work, tests, and homework.

*Negative Comments:*

-There's too much homework at this school.
-At this school you are either a good student or a poor student -- there is no in between.
-No one at this school tells students what courses they need for graduation.
-Many teachers base grades in part on how much they like you.
-Some kids make it hard to do class work. This person he sits beside me and he is always talking and I just can't concentrate.
-My English teacher gives us too much at one time and we have to turn it in by a certain time.
-She don't like teaching. She always be complaining about how students don't do work and how some better than others.
-I don't know what she basis grades on. She gives us these points on some things and drops a grade. I don't know. I can't figure it out.
-He was nice, but couldn't teach.
-She complained all the time.
-She had a real attitude problem.
-Some classes are so big the teacher never has a chance to work with students.
-In some classes other students make it difficult to learn; they are too loud and rowdy.

Table 7

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND WORK

Student Comments on Activities Outside of School

*Extracurricular Clubs & Sports:*

-I don't participate in any activities 'cause there aren't any I'm interested in.
-I don't belong to any clubs or groups. They don't interest me.
-I participate in sports: football and wrestling and think its important.
-I belong to a school music group - I really like it.
-They don't have enough sports at this school - they should have karate.

*Work:*

-I don't participate in any activities because I work [37 hours per week].
-I have a job but it doesn't affect my school work.
-I work afternoons at McDonalds as a cashier. I enjoy it.
-I don't work.

Table 8

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM
RELATIONSHIPS

Student Comments on Their Friends and Parents

*Friends and Classmates:*

-No, I don't have lots of friends at this school. I like to do stuff on my own.
-I mostly be by myself which I like because if you be around a lot of friends who might cause trouble you can get into trouble; and I'm not the kind of person who likes to get into trouble.
-Kids at this school are mean. They start fights. I guess some of my friends would like to get kicked out of school, suspended, so they could stay at home. It's not going to solve anything. It's not worth it, especially if you're a senior.
-My best friend is real quiet. She's like me. She wants to graduate.
-I got lots of friends here. Having friends at school is very important.
-Kids are real friendly at this school; they speak to you in the halls.

*Parents and Homework:*

-My parents want to see my report card.
-My parents have a very good opinion about this school.
-My parents taught me, never say you can't do something.
-I tell my parents about school; about my grades and if I don't know how to do some things.
-My parents ask me things like have I done my homework and how was school today.
-My parents like to see my homework sometimes, but they always ask about grades.
-I don't know what my parents' opinions are of this school.
-My parents never come to open house or other school activities.
-I study in the kitchen at a table.
-I don't have a special place at home to do my homework.
-I have a desk in my room where I do my homework.

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